



STARlight,  
STARbright\*\*\*



## 2018-2019 Annual Report

*Providing services to people impacted with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families in Fairfield County since 1952.*

birth to three ★ employment ★ residential support ★ sports buddies ★ seniors program  
day services ★ transportation ★ family support ★ recreation ★ high school transition

# Transformational! STAR Headquarters' New Future!



Midway through a massive renovation funded by over **\$2,500,000** from the Governor's Nonprofit Grant Program, STAR Headquarters boasts plans for a complete facelift and energy-saving improvements to windows, doors, skylights, and HVAC. Interior work continues with new carpeting, paint, molding, furnishings and other features to improve safety, accessibility, and efficiency. With the expert help of Leigh Overland Architects, reimagined space in garages and stock areas are being converted to flexible program space for the growing variety of programs offered to over 300 adults served by STAR each year.



## WORDS FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This past year reaped the benefits from years of advocacy and education on behalf of the dedicated direct care staff who devote their talents to supporting and improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. The CT legislature passed a minimum wage bill for direct support staff effective 1/1/2019 as a long-awaited first step to recognize the true value of the skilled professionals who have devoted their lives to this meaningful work.

Thanks to their commitment, side by side with community partners, legislators, and support from our generous friends like you, STAR continues to shine in the delivery of services that lead to independence, hope, respect, confidence and opportunities to help people thrive.

As we enter our 68th year, the STAR Headquarters is undergoing a major transformation thanks to grants from the Governor's Nonprofit Grant Program. Renovations to the entrance, former sheltered workshop, stock area and garage – are redefining spaces to meet the needs and challenges of the next generation where full inclusion, technology and greater opportunities for independence are the norm.

## INTRODUCING **Jump**STARs

A collaboration of JumpStart, JCC and STAR, Inc. to provide a series of activities that are educational, recreational, and social. Our mission is to promote well-being and create a family support network for parents, caregivers, relatives, and siblings of individuals of all ages who are impacted by intellectual and developmental disabilities. Please join our JumpSTARs FaceBook page to stay in-the-loop on family network news <https://www.facebook.com/groups/437955726789553/>



**Assaf Ben-Atar**  
President



**Katie Banzhaf**  
Executive Director

# Little STARs — Big Dreams, Bright Futures!

As a teacher and a new mother, Casey marked the milestones of her firstborn son, Auggie, with loving social media posts. At fifteen months, she felt that his communication and social skills might not be developmentally on track. She reached out to STAR for an evaluation thinking deep down, **“I don’t want him to qualify for services,”** for fear of some stigma that might ensue. In retrospect, Casey recounts that early intervention is **“A good thing”**. Auggie has been working with STAR therapists and his parents and teachers at home and at his preschool on tools that have helped him be patient, use his words, socialize, and enjoy different foods. Best of all, when the STAR therapist arrives, **“Auggie jumps up and down and runs in circles because he believes she is there to play.”** Casey tracks his new milestones with special fondness for moments when Auggie makes eye contact, blows kisses, waves hello, shares toys, and says to his mom, **“Love, too!”**

Last November, Auggie welcomed a baby brother, Bear, who was born with a slight heart murmur and a few complications that led to the early diagnosis of a rare syndrome. Casey credits the STAR therapist for being by her side as she took Bear to the hospital for tests, and offered an arm of support. As Bear celebrates his first birthday, making great progress every day, his parents and the STAR therapist work as a team on strategies to help him with his speech, eating and motor skills. Casey and Matt, see only a bright future for their sons. Last year STAR served 316 local children. Over 35% of those children achieved their age-appropriate developmental milestones by age three. 100% leave STAR with an individual family service plan.

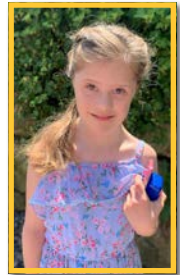


## A Rising STAR Named Hope

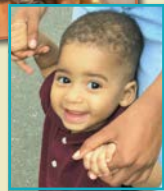
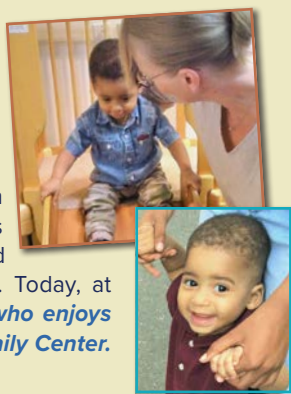
Beyond Birth to Three, STAR’s goal is to provide a springboard for children to a lifetime of learning and opportunities in an inclusive setting. Hope, now **“every bit a teenager”** according to her mom, is a seventh grader in middle school. She has joined her peers in five plays, is a girl scout and plans to attend college upon graduation from high school.

When asked to list some of her favorite things, Hope shares, **“Swimming, movies, cuddles, music, school acting, dancing, writing fiction, books, chocolate, family, wearing dresses, and going to sleep at 10 p.m.”** Her mom recalls an early lesson from Hope. Amazed, that without any parental teaching, at age 2 ½ Hope surprised them by reciting the alphabet—a milestone they did not expect at that age. In what her mom called one of her **“bad parenting moments,”** she was not assuming competence.

**“From that day forward, Hope taught everyone to assume she can do it... and, that is what we love about STAR’s philosophy—they presume competence.”**



**Elijah...**This tiny STAR was only one pound fourteen ounces when he was born as a **“Premie.”** When Elijah was about five months, he met a STAR physical therapist to work on motor concerns, muscle tone, and sensitivity to touch. His mom, Betty, is a dedicated Birth to Three parent who has prioritized her son’s needs and practices all the teaching tools shared by the therapist to track Elijah’s progress daily. Today, at nineteen months, Elijah is a **“Funny little man who enjoys his independence and loves STAR’s Rubino Family Center. He is power walking through the house!”**



### STARs Off to School



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# A Galaxy of Opportunities for STAR Participants!

STAR's Day Services provided over 925 classes this year for individuals with I/DD. Classes included financial literacy, first aid / CPR, public speaking, social and business etiquette, equine care and horseback riding, theatre, aqua fitness, pottery, dance, animal caretakers, book club at the library, fitness, cooking/baking, art, music appreciation and nutrition.

STAR added special classes and recreational activities geared specifically for recent high school graduates and young adults. Participants learn new skills, build confidence, socialize with their peers, and engage in the wealth of inclusive educational offerings and new experiences.

STAR participants volunteered 2,430 hours this year. The participants volunteered at Person-to-Person, Meals on Wheels, Waveny Care Center, New Canaan Nature Center, The Marvin, Kingsway, Open Door Shelter, New Canaan Mounted Troop, Domestic Violence Center and Circle Care.



## Stay Awake to See the STARS

STAR is pleased to collaborate with our new friends at Solude Coffee, Norwalk, CT. to offer some of the richest, air-roasted coffee blends you have ever experienced. Solude has recently signed up as a STAR employer providing a meaningful job to a person with I/DD. Shop three exclusive STAR blends or Solude's world-class varieties. Special STAR gift boxes make the perfect holiday or any-occasion gift.

**20% of every purchase will be donated to support STAR and local people with disabilities.**

- ☆ Freshly air roasted to order
- ☆ Ships anywhere in the USA
- ☆ Organic, Fair Trade & specialty blends
- ☆ Whole bean, ground and single serve filters
- ☆ Great for gifts
- ☆ All coffee is certified Kosher

**Order now at:**  
[www.soludecoffee.com](http://www.soludecoffee.com)  
**Select STAR when placing your order**  
**Calling all coffee lovers to "Switch to SOLUDE!"**

Please share this with your connections in businesses, clubs, churches/temples, schools, hotels and other coffee-serving locations. New accounts referred by STAR will add to the donations that benefit STAR.



## STAR Sports Buddies Program Promotes Inclusion

Every Saturday the Horsburgh family attends the STAR Sport Buddies program at New Canaan High School where their daughter, Isle, 11, enjoys playing a variety of seasonal sports. The family recently discovered STAR's Sports Buddies program that enables youth with I/DD to participate in weekly sports activities like their typical peers. It encourages physical activity and builds confidence and friendships. It has also become a way for parents of local youth with I/DD to connect with other families and build a network of support. **"Sports Buddies was the first time we met parents of other kids with special needs in a non-therapeutic session,"** says Brian Horsburgh, Isle's father. **"This program has brought more school connectivity and has really opened up Isle's social network. She has built some nice friendships."**

STAR aligned with the Sports Buddies five years ago, offering administrative assistance, marketing and promotion to participants and volunteers. Founded by two special education teachers who recognized that those sports opportunities were limited for the children with special needs, Sports Buddies pairs athletes with special needs with youth and adult volunteers (**"buddies"**) to learn basic skills, improve physical conditioning, experience team dynamics, build self-esteem and have fun. Volunteers are needed. Please contact [sportsbuddiesNC@gmail.com](mailto:sportsbuddiesNC@gmail.com).



# STARs Shine on-the-Job with Customized Employment!

STAR is a recognized leader in Connecticut in job placements, coaching, and hours worked competitively by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In the past year, STAR placed 11 people in new jobs including 5 “first jobs” for people 18-42 years old. The average tenure of the 67 employees supported by STAR is 9.2 years!

STAR’s Customized Employment Program centers on individualized placements coordinated by a team of professional employment specialists. The team works with individuals to discover skills and interests and matches them with local business needs to create a win-win!



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# Everybody Loves Raymond **STAR's Official Greeter!**



There is hardly a visitor to STAR Headquarters who has not met Raymond. Within minutes of seeing a new face, Raymond (Ray) is quick to broaden his smile, extend his hand as introduction, and ask, **“What day is your birthday?”** As one offers the date of their birthday, Raymond instantly responds to their amazement, **“This year it is on a Thursday!”** Of course, he is correct. He went down a line of 24 volunteers and got 100% of their birthdays correct!

Raymond, now 59 years old, is a resident at Martin House, a shorefront property in Norwalk managed by STAR that is home to 8 people with I/DD. Raymond has lived there since he was 21 and, as his mother shares, **“That is his family. That is his home. He has a beautiful water view room with his own TV, great housemates and a caring staff. That is where he wants to spend his holidays. That’s where he belongs.”**

Sadly, Raymond’s life was not always so kind. Unfortunately, he spent his early years from six to twenty-one in institutions—a situation that was commonplace for many of his generation and advised by many in the medical field. It wasn’t until his mom got a confidential call from an institution staff member saying, **“You need to get Raymond out of here....he can really make it outside,”** that she was able to move him to his new home at Martin House for a fresh start. At the time, she feared that some of his behaviors might disqualify the move, but a caring staff and a lot of patience made his transition successful **“All because people cared.”**

Today, Raymond is taking advantage of many of life’s

opportunities. He has a daily job in the STAR Café as the dishwasher. He gets a paycheck and treats himself to iced decaf coffee at Mobile Mart, buys new clothes, soda and special treats. He participates in Theater of STARs, bowling, likes to dance, sing, and enjoys watching Giants football and The Price is Right. His mom gives him the new Giants calendar every year that he immediately studies and memorizes. He is good at math. More recently, he has learned to use an iPad and enjoys games and puzzles that include numbers, shapes and time.

In a heartfelt comment, his mom recounts her pride in Raymond’s continued progress, **“He is making strides all the time. In the last year, I have noticed a big difference in his speech and communication. He is caring and loving. Instead of just talking, I find that we are having real conversations. It is as if our dreams have come true. When I see Raymond at STAR, I know he is safe, happy and in a good place.”**

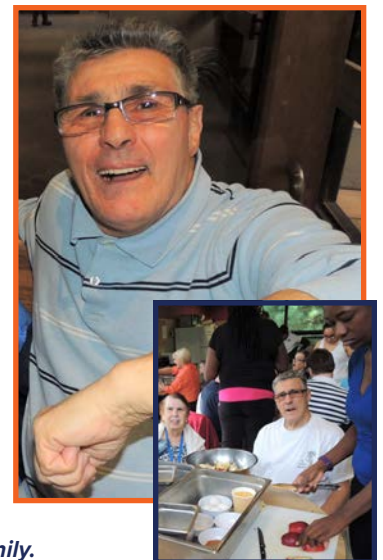


## Good Guy Gaita—Uncle Johnny STARs with his Family

To say that John Gaita is a family man is an understatement. As his sister, one of John’s six siblings shared, **“John is a blessing in our life. We all grew up with a handicapped person and always treated him as if he wasn’t. To this day, John is a big part of our family. He has taken care of all of us and, in turn, we would do anything for him.”** Affectionately referred to as Uncle Johnny in his Norwalk-based family, John is proud of his 17 nieces and nephews, 34 great nieces and nephews, and 8 ½ great-great nieces and nephews! He is credited with saving the life of his three-year-old brother from drowning and for loving to take all the kids for walks in their strollers.

John also has a large family of friends at STAR. His staff refers to him as the **“Ultimate good guy.”** He is very, very competitive and will insist on playing a game repeatedly until he wins. He is cooperative, likes to be busy, loves field trips, ‘oldies’ songs (especially Italian crooners) to sing along with on Karaoke, collecting coins and business cards, and always being busy. In STAR Seniors Day Program that serves fifteen adults, John has a job every morning helping with the coffee and filling supplies for the day. His peers and staff are jealous each day as they watch John unpack and enjoy the amazing gourmet lunches packed by his caring family.

At age 80, John has a long history with STAR. He loves bowling, bingo, cooking class, and crafts. For years, he worked as part of the crew in the STAR Café. In 1964, he was one of the first residents of then-state-run Martin House where he lived for 37 years until he moved back with his mother and sister. He gave a tour of the group home to then-governor Ella Grasso and met President Bill Clinton when he was visiting a neighbor. John has a love of baseball and has a 1952 Yankee uniform given to him by his father who brought him to Yankee stadium where he met legendary greats Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra. He enjoys his trips to Florida with his sister and the chance to visit his out-of-town relatives. **The STAR family is lucky to share John Gaita’s big heart with his big family.**



# Volunteers Shine Bright at STAR All Year!

STAR is extremely grateful for the overwhelming community support shown by over **700** volunteers of all ages who, last year, shared over **4,500** hours of service to help people with I/DD. Volunteers assist with recreation, clerical functions, fundraisers, research, painting, landscaping, garden club, serving on the Board of Directors and more. If you or your group at work, school or church/temple would like to share your time and talents please sign up online [www.starct.org](http://www.starct.org) or contact Jennifer Thompson [jthompson@starct.org](mailto:jthompson@starct.org) to join our family of dedicated volunteers. We can put your talent to work and make you smile, too!



YOUR DONATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE — Time, Money, Cars, Stock [WWW.STARCT.ORG](http://WWW.STARCT.ORG)

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[www.starct.org](http://www.starct.org)

**Our Mission** STAR, Inc., **Lighting the Way** is a not-for-profit organization serving individuals of all ages who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), as well as providing support services to their families. We create opportunities for individuals to live full lives with independence, freedom of choice, and personal growth by providing support, services, and advocacy. We inform and encourage the community to recognize and appreciate the value of all individuals.



182 Wolfpit Ave., Norwalk, CT 06851 | 203.846.9581 | www.starct.org



STAR's Annual Gala and Auction, **Savory STARS from Farm to Table 2018**, attracted over 300 generous guests and scores of donors and sponsors who raised over \$330,000 to support STAR's **Birth to Three**, **Customized Employment** and other programs for our neighbors with I/DD.



Guest speaker **Barbara Pierce Bush** was featured at STAR's **Seventh Annual Speakers Luncheon** in April. Continuing the family tradition where her sister Jenna was STAR's very first speaker, Barbara's inspirational story helped raise over \$30,000 at the sold-out event at **Woodway Country Club** in Darien. The event featured a hand-selected vendor fashion boutique that benefitted STAR.



Sherwood Island State Park in Westport was the drizzly spring scene of STAR's **14th Annual Walk, 5K Run & Roll** that attracted over 500 participants and volunteers to raise over \$105,000, led by **Team Ariel Levy** who beat their all-time 14-year record by raising almost \$30,000! **STAR's Third Annual Golf Outing** and Family BBQ fundraiser at **Silvermine Golf Club** in Norwalk in September 2019 attracted dozens of players and family members in an ever-growing inclusive event for all ages and abilities.



**Aitoro Appliance Showroom** in Norwalk once again hosted STAR's **Annual Galaxy of Gourmets** event that included over 18 local restaurants and chefs and live bands. **NFL Alumni Fairfield County Chapter** presented STAR with a donation check for \$5,000 to benefit STAR's **Birth to Three Program** as part of their annual **Super Bowl Ticket Raffle** and Golf Outing to support local children's charities.

**OFFICERS**

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*Treasurer*
- Kate Bagnati**  
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- Joe Muro**
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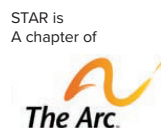
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STAR is especially thankful for our partnership and support from:



STAR is grateful to all of our generous corporate, foundation, and individual donors throughout the year. We appreciate the families and friends who choose to make STAR the beneficiary of special gifts in memory or in honorarium, especially those who have included STAR in their estate planning and wills as new members of our STAR Foundation Legacy Society.

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